

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 464 166

UD 034 937

TITLE Focus on Children II: Boston's Education Reform Plan, 2001-2006.

INSTITUTION Boston Public Schools, MA.

PUB DATE 2001-04-25

NOTE 26p.; Adopted by the Boston School Committee, April 25, 2001. For "Focus on Children. A Comprehensive Reform Plan for the Boston Public Schools," see ED 408 393.

PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Academic Standards; *Educational Change; Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Faculty Development; Literacy Education; Mathematics Education; Partnerships in Education; Public Schools; Student Evaluation; Urban Schools

IDENTIFIERS Boston Public Schools MA; Reform Efforts

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the Boston Public Schools have generated many successful changes in practice and produced significant improvements in student results, focusing on the improvement of teaching and learning to enable all students to achieve high standards of performance. Steps supporting standards-based reform were taken in the areas of teaching and learning, school choice, technology, investment in educators, resources, and support. Focus on Children established a new emphasis on high standards. The city's leadership united in pursuing ambitious goals. Teachers expressed commitment to improving instructional practice as the key to student achievement. The community is strongly engaged in schools. The challenge for the future is to accelerate reform efforts across the board. The district will use high standards to drive instruction and professional development, draw on the resources and expertise of families and communities, and utilize student performance data to help teachers and administrators identify what is working and where changes are needed. Six essentials for whole school improvement are emphasizing literacy and mathematics; using student work and data to identify student needs, improve instruction, and assess progress; providing professional development for teachers and principals to improve instruction; identifying and replicating best practices for instruction; aligning resources with instructional focus; and engaging families and communities in whole school improvement. (SM)

**FOCUS ON CHILDREN II: BOSTON'S EDUCATION REFORM
PLAN: 2001-2006**

**Boston Public Schools
2001**

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS
BEEN GRANTED BY

M.M. Callahan
Boston Public Schools

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☐ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.
- ☒ Minor changes have been made to
improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this
document do not necessarily represent
official OERI position or policy.

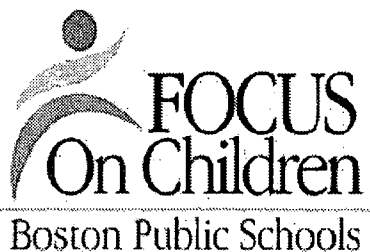
Focus On Children II

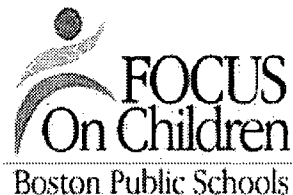
Boston's Education Reform Plan: 2001-2006

ADOPTED BY THE BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE

APRIL 25, 2001

The First Five Years: 1996-2001	1
A Standards-Based Approach	1
The Reforms	2
The Results	5
Focus On Children II: 2001-2006	6
Unifying Goal: Accelerated, Continuous Improvement	6
What We Have Learned	6
Whole School Improvement	8
The Six Essentials	8
Essential One: Literacy and Mathematics	9
Essential Two: Student Work and Data	11
Essential Three: Professional Development	12
Essential Four: Best Practices	13
Essential Five: Resource Alignment	14
Essential Six: Family and Community Engagement	15
District-wide Support for Continuous Improvement	17
Safe, Caring State-of-the-Art Learning Environments	17
Operations and Business Support Systems	19
Effective, Respectful Communication	21
Conclusion	22





Focus On Children II

Boston's Education Reform Plan:
2001-2006

The First Five Years: 1996-2001

In 1996, the Boston Public Schools adopted *Focus On Children*, an ambitious five-year education reform plan developed through broad-based community discussions about the needs of Boston students and families. The plan was designed to serve as a blueprint for improvement throughout the system – from central offices to every classroom in every school.

Under the leadership of Mayor Thomas M. Menino, the Boston School Committee and Superintendent Thomas W. Payzant, the Boston Public Schools have set upon a sound course for continuous improvement. With the adoption of *Focus On Children*, the BPS community – educators, families, students and partners – shifted its focus to the primary goal of **improving teaching and learning to enable all students to achieve high standards of performance.**

A Standards-Based Approach

Focus On Children established a new emphasis on high standards as a critically important element of effective teaching. Shortly after the adoption of the plan, Boston developed new **Citywide Learning Standards**, a set of high performance requirements in major subjects at all grade levels. Boston also launched a more rigorous approach to student evaluation – the **Stanford 9 Achievement Tests** – and established more demanding **promotion and attendance** requirements for students at every grade level.

Boston's standards-based approach was developed in conjunction with statewide education reforms, including new **Curriculum Frameworks** and a state-mandated test, the **Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)**, which is slated to become a graduation requirement in 2003. The alignment of city and state standards has enabled Boston to assess the progress of both students and schools – and to hold itself more accountable to all stakeholders.

An aggressive emphasis on high standards, an instructional focus on literacy and mathematics, and targeted professional development for principals and teachers have made standards-based reform a day-to-day reality in every school in Boston.

The Reforms

In recent years, Boston has undertaken many ambitious steps to support standards-based reform.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- **Literacy** has been adopted as the instructional focus in every school.
- In 1995, Boston became one of the first cities to launch an early literacy campaign – **ReadBoston** – which has brought more than 1,000 volunteers and 200,000 new books to Boston's schools.
- Boston teachers and principals at every grade level are participating in a \$4 million training initiative in **math instruction** to accelerate student achievement.
- For students at the highest risk of failure, Boston established a 12-month school year with over \$25 million in intensive **extra supports** in reading and math, including “transition services” at the pivotal grades of 3, 6 and 9.
- In 2000, BPS invested \$4 million to expand its new mandatory **summer school** program, with more than 750 teachers providing intensive help in reading and math to almost twice as many at risk students as in the previous summer. Over 7,200 students completed the program, of whom 62% were promoted to the next grade level.
- Beginning in 1998, every five-year-old in Boston was guaranteed a **full-day kindergarten** seat.
- Mayor Menino created the **Boston 2:00-to-6:00 After-School Initiative** to expand and improve after-school programming throughout the city. Since 1998, the initiative has supported the creation of 2,800 new spaces and the opening of 41 new after-school programs in school buildings.
- By 2002, Boston will have invested more than \$15 million to **reduce class size** at every grade level.
- To provide more direct adult/student contact, all of the city's **high schools** are restructuring from traditional large-school models to smaller schools within a school.

- By September 2001, every high school will offer **Advanced Placement** courses, increasing the number of AP classes by more than 60% in just two years.
- BPS developed a new **Accountability System** to measure school and student progress and to track improvement against annual goals.
- Boston launched **Countdown to Kindergarten**, an initiative which helps students and families make a positive transition from home or pre-school into kindergarten.

SCHOOL CHOICE

- Boston has maintained its commitment to offering families **school choice**. The school assignment policy has been modified to promote diverse classrooms while improving families' access to schools near home.
- Since 1995, Boston has opened nine **pilot schools** and two **Horace Mann Charter Schools** – in-district charter schools providing laboratories for educational innovation – and three new **Early Education Centers**.
- During the 2001-2002 school year, construction will begin on the first three of **five new schools** planned for neighborhoods where the number of school-aged children exceeds the number of available seats.
- The district has expanded its investment in **alternative education**. Since 1999, Boston has created new middle and high schools for disruptive students, additional alternative high school programs and an after-hours high school for students over age 19.

TECHNOLOGY

- With the infusion of over 11,000 new computers into Boston's classrooms through Mayor Menino's **technology initiative**, the computer to student ratio has improved from 1:63 to 1:6. Boston has invested more than \$143 million in public and private funds for school technology.
- In 1998, Boston became the **first major urban school system** in the country to be fully networked with high-speed Internet access in every school.
- Over 65% of Boston teachers are trained and **using the Internet** in their classrooms.
- The district launched **TechBoston**, an innovative program to prepare middle and high school students for careers in technology.

INVESTING IN EDUCATORS

- The most recent contract with the **Boston Teachers Union** includes innovative education and management reforms while offering teachers fair compensation.
- Through the **Boston Annenberg Challenge**, all of Boston's 130 schools are receiving intensive school-based support to improve instruction in every classroom.
- Superintendent Payzant has appointed new **principals and headmasters** in more than half of the city's schools.
- The district has made a significant investment in and restructured its **Human Resources** functions to improve recruitment, hiring, training and evaluation of highly qualified teachers and other staff.
- Boston has launched an ambitious **teacher recruitment** campaign, including the opening of a new Recruitment Center.

RESOURCES & SUPPORT

- Between fiscal years 1996 and 2002, the School Department's **operating budget** increased by 43% -- to more than \$635 million.
- Since 1996, Boston has invested more than \$11 million in **new textbooks** in English, math, science, history/social science, and world languages.
- Between 1996 and 2003, the City will have invested close to \$370 million of **capital funds** in public school buildings.
- Since 1995, Boston has increased its **external funding** from public and private sources by more than 82 percent – to over \$114 million.
- Boston's **business community** has donated \$15 million to match the Annenberg Foundation's \$10 million gift to the city's schools. Each year, more than \$5 million in public funds also has been redirected to school-based professional development.
- In April 2000, Mayor Menino, Superintendent Payzant, the Boston School Committee and the Boston Teachers Union joined representatives of the business, human services, higher education and cultural sectors in signing the fourth **Boston Compact** – which includes commitments from all signatories to support ambitious student achievement goals.

The Results

These and many other reforms have had a positive, measurable impact on public education in Boston. Test scores and other data show that Boston's schools and students have demonstrated continuous improvement over the last five years:

- From 1997 to 2000, the percentage of students scoring in the upper three performance levels of the **Stanford 9** test has increased steadily – in reading from 75% to 81%, and in mathematics from 52% to 63%. The percentage of students in the lowest scoring level has decreased in every grade.
- Since 1998, Boston's **MCAS** results have improved across all grades and subject areas. BPS gains exceeded statewide gains in every grade and subject, except grade 8 in reading and science, where Boston and state gains are equal.
- Boston's annual student **attendance** rate rose to 92.2% in 2000, up from 90.5% in 1997, following a strict new attendance policy. In its first two years, the new policy reduced the number of chronically truant students by 12%.
- More Boston graduates are going on to **higher education** than ever before. An estimated 68% of 1999 graduates went on to college – up from 50% in 1983 and 5% higher than the national average.
- Boston's annual **dropout rate** fell from 9.4% in 1999 to 8.3% in 2000.
- Since 1995, Boston students' average scores on the Scholastic Assessment Test (**SAT**) have increased by 16 points in Verbal and 8 points in Mathematics – four times the national average gain.
- Since 1995, 14 out of 15 Boston high schools have upgraded their **accreditation** status to "fully accredited." Major **capital renovations** at three Boston high schools are expected to restore the final school's warning status to full accreditation.

These results lead to two strong conclusions:

- **The Boston Public Schools are demonstrating steady improvement.**
- **The rate of improvement must accelerate.**

The outcomes of the first five-year plan confirm that Boston is moving in the right direction. Now the challenge is to stay the course while accelerating improvement in all areas and at all levels for the next five years and beyond.

Focus On Children II: 2001-2006

The conversations in Boston schools today – among teachers, administrators, families, students and community partners – are different than they were five years ago. **The conversations are now about instruction:** what we have learned, what needs to be improved, whom we can bring in to help us, and how we can share what we have learned among ourselves and others.

The top priority for every school and for the district as a whole is to accelerate the continuous improvement of teaching and learning to enable all students to meet high standards.

UNIFYING GOAL OF FOCUS ON CHILDREN II:

Accelerate the continuous improvement
of teaching and learning to enable all
students to meet high standards.

What We Have Learned

The history of urban education has not been to stay focused on the single goal of student improvement, but rather to shift, add, or create new priorities in response to leadership or political changes or crises of the moment. *Focus On Children II* insists that if we persist in a thoughtful and unifying process of continuous improvement, we will achieve the results we seek.

The many lessons that have been learned over the past five years are the foundation upon which the next five years of education reform will be built. They include:

- **High standards**, whether established by the school district or the state and when aligned with what is being taught and tested in the classroom, can improve achievement among all students.

- Schools must be **accountable** for results to all stakeholders – especially students, families and the community. The district must demonstrate that the emphasis on high standards is making a positive impact on student achievement. All efforts to improve instruction – at the district, school and classroom level – must be effectively measured to determine what is working and what is not and to inform continued education reform efforts.
- Two kinds of **leadership** are critical for school improvement – a strong principal or headmaster and a strong Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). Schools improve most effectively when the principal and ILT work together to set and maintain goals, ensure continuity over a period of years, and communicate expectations clearly, broadly and consistently to the entire school community.
- Every school benefits from being part of a **learning network** of schools where experiences and best practices are shared. The most vital form of professional development takes place directly in schools and classrooms where teachers and administrators support and critique one another.
- No school district can operate in isolation. **External partnerships** are key to bringing fresh perspective, expertise and resources into schools to accelerate improvement.

Who are effective school leaders?

An effective **principal or headmaster** is a leader who engages in teaching and learning with teachers and coaches, takes part in looking at student work, visits classrooms on a daily basis, sets high expectations for all staff and students, and proactively engages families and the community in the education of children.

An effective **Instructional Leadership Team (ILT)** meets regularly to plan school-wide instructional improvement, discuss goals, look at student work, share best practices, and identify professional development needs. The ILT is selected by the principal or headmaster and includes a representative group of teachers and other school staff as well as a parent, and, at the secondary level, a student. The principal or headmaster reports on the work of the ILT to the entire school staff and to the School Site Council.

The Next Five Years: Shifting from “Whole School Change” to “Whole School Improvement”

Significant changes take place in schools only when the entire school – students, staff, families and partners – is engaged in the process. The shift from whole school change to whole school improvement reflects the district’s recognition that instructional improvement must be continuous and ongoing.

Whole School Improvement is a collaborative process that leads to measurable improvement in student performance. It requires all stakeholders to look at a school’s many challenges and opportunities not in isolation but in their entirety.

Every school will develop a **Whole School Improvement Plan (WSIP)**, which will direct all aspects of a school’s work. The WSIP will provide direction for the work of principals/headmasters, teachers, coaches, school hiring teams, the School Site Council and School Parent Council, and all outside collaborators. The Instructional Leadership Team, with the support of school coaches and specialists, will be responsible for a progress review three times per year.

Instructional improvement for the next five years will be organized around the **Six Essentials for Whole School Improvement**. These Six Essentials are modifications of those approved by the Boston School Committee in 1997 and have been revised to reflect the lessons that have been learned since then.

THE SIX ESSENTIALS FOR WHOLE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

- ONE:** Focus on literacy and mathematics.
- TWO:** Use student work and data to identify student needs, improve instruction and assess progress.
- THREE:** Focus professional development to offer teachers and principals the skills they need to improve instruction.
- FOUR:** Identify and replicate best practices for instruction.
- FIVE:** Align all resources with the instructional focus.
- SIX:** Engage families, community and partners to support Whole School Improvement.

Essential One: Focus on literacy and mathematics.

Literacy and mathematics are the building blocks for educational success. Every student must master these skills in order to perform at high levels in all subject areas. Therefore every Boston school will be required to concentrate instructional efforts on reading, writing and mathematics across all subjects and at all grade levels.

The instructional focus on literacy and mathematics is intended to **improve student achievement** across the board and help **close the achievement gap**. As part of a districtwide priority, each school will establish explicit goals for each of the next five years.

In order to strengthen instruction and student achievement in literacy and mathematics, all **elementary schools** will:

- strengthen the connections between schools and community-based organizations which support the development of early childhood education, including additional opportunities for three- and four-year-olds;
- participate in "Countdown to Kindergarten," a new initiative which helps ensure a positive academic and social transition from home or pre-school into kindergarten;
- implement the ten components of the district's balanced literacy model to teach reading;
- train all teachers and administrators with in teaching reading through Reader's Workshop and writing through Writer's Workshop;
- complete the three-year implementation of the new elementary mathematics curriculum in school year 2002-2003;
- strengthen the transition program in literacy and mathematics for all students who have not met Level 2 benchmarks on at least one of several district assessments;
- increase the use of technology as a tool to support instruction in literacy and mathematics;
- expand collaboration and alignment with after-school programs; and
- introduce new elementary report cards to improve communication with families and feedback to students.

In order to strengthen instruction and student achievement in literacy and mathematics, all **middle schools** will:

- implement literacy across the curriculum in all subjects;
- train all administrators and language arts teachers in teaching reading through Reader's Workshop and writing through Writer's Workshop;
- provide all administrators and teachers of other subjects with training on how to improve reading for understanding and writing using the content of social studies, science, mathematics, world languages and the arts;

- complete the three-year implementation of the new middle school mathematics curriculum in school year 2002-2003;
- strengthen the transition program in literacy and mathematics in Grade 6 for all students who have not met Level 2 benchmarks on at least one of several district assessments, with a particular focus on preventing middle school dropouts;
- increase the use of technology as a tool to support instruction in literacy and mathematics; and
- complete implementation (in participating middle schools) of the GEAR UP program, a five-year, \$15 million initiative to increase the college application and matriculation rates of Boston students.

Like urban high schools throughout the nation, Boston's **high schools** present a special challenge for ensuring a schoolwide focus on literacy and mathematics. Over the next several years, Boston will be more directive, aggressive and urgent in the high school reform process and will seek new funding from the Annenberg and Carnegie Foundations and other sources to support this work.

The guiding principle of these reform efforts will be to reorganize every district high school into **small learning communities**, which are characterized by a common set of adults who teach the same students and a distinctive identity, theme or academic/career focus.

In order to prepare students effectively for college and career, high schools must also:

- connect instruction in literacy across all subject areas;
- train all administrators and teachers in literacy across the curriculum;
- complete the three-year implementation of the new high school mathematics curriculum in school year 2002-2003;
- offer every student the necessary courses to qualify for college;
- make School-to-Career and other technical/vocational programs available to all students;
- work closely with the Private Industry Council to expand the academic component of after-school and summer jobs programs;
- develop a strategy to serve returning students who have dropped out and disruptive students who require additional time and attention from staff; and
- adopt new schedules that are flexible enough to allow students to take double blocks in core subjects, to follow career pathways, and to take Advanced Placement courses.

In the years ahead, more will be required than ever before from the high schools themselves and from the Boston community – including employers and other partners.

What every school will achieve:

- ✓ The principals or headmaster and the Instructional Leadership Team will ensure that the Literacy and Mathematics Plans are implemented consistently across all classrooms and in all subject areas.
- ✓ The literacy and mathematics curricula will be made understandable to all teaching and non-teaching staff.

- ✓ Literacy and mathematics coaches and specialists will support teachers in strengthening instructional practices.
- ✓ Students who are furthest behind in literacy and mathematics will receive additional instruction and support through Transition Programs for grades 3, 6 and 9.

Essential Two: Use student work and data to identify student needs, improve instruction and assess progress.

The best evidence of effective teaching and learning is the work that students themselves produce – especially performance on standardized tests and classroom assignments and participation.

The State's **MCAS** exams and the district's **Stanford 9** exams in particular provide valuable data about the progress students and schools are making toward their goals. The district will continue to work closely with principals and teachers to understand how student performance on these tests can be interpreted to identify strengths and gaps in instruction.

Similarly, educators and families alike must be skilled in **Looking at Student Work** – a collaborative process of examining student homework and other assignments over a period of time to assess individual progress. This approach also encourages teachers from different subject areas to develop **student portfolios** and compare work produced by the same student in different classrooms. By doing so, teachers can more easily determine which instructional approaches are most successful for each student's learning style.

What every school will achieve:

- ✓ All staff will be trained to examine, evaluate, interpret and discuss student work.
- ✓ Criteria for evaluating student work will be used consistently throughout the school and will be understood by staff, students and families.
- ✓ Every student will be tested in reading, writing and mathematics three times each year. Teachers will use this performance data throughout the year to map the necessary steps for moving students from where they are to where they need to be.
- ✓ Teachers will use year-end standardized test data (Stanford 9 and MCAS) to identify students' strengths and gaps and modify instructional practices accordingly.

Essential Three: Focus **professional development** to offer teachers and principals the skills they need to improve instruction.

In order to foster improved student achievement, Boston's teachers and principals must have opportunities to learn new instructional techniques. Whole School Improvement is dependent upon a **professional development** strategy which requires educators to re-examine and strengthen their own classroom instructional practices.

To that end, Boston's professional development efforts over the next five years will be:

- focused on closing the gap between performance goals and actual student achievement;
- designed in part based on teachers' self-identified learning needs;
- school-based and incorporated into the day-to-day work of teaching;
- organized around collaborative problem-solving;
- continuous and ongoing, with follow-up and support for further learning;
- evaluated in a variety of ways – including assessments of student progress and observable demonstration of improved instruction;
- inclusive of explanation about the theory underlying the skills being learned; and
- connected to the Whole School Improvement process.

To ensure adherence to these principles, Boston will deepen its commitment to school-based coaching, ensuring that all schools have high-quality, well-trained **coaches and specialists** to support improved instruction. The district will provide principals and teachers with intensive, targeted training and peer support through a variety of central offices. Schools also will continue to rely on rich partnerships with the **Boston Plan for Excellence / Boston Annenberg Challenge** and other external resources to provide expertise and new perspectives.

What every school will achieve:

- ✓ Every Whole School Improvement Plan will include a detailed strategy for ongoing professional development.
- ✓ These professional development plans will be the result of teachers, school leaders, coaches and other partners collaborating to identify instructional needs.
- ✓ New teachers will participate in intensive, targeted efforts focused on providing the support, guidance, and training necessary to succeed.

Essential Four: Identify and replicate **best practices** for instruction.

When identifying practices for improving student achievement, Boston teachers often have to look no farther than their own school or other schools in the district for effective models. Schools throughout the city have developed a variety of effective strategies for supporting the needs of all learners.

Boston will take a more active role in encouraging the sharing of **best practices** within and between schools. The district will identify **Effective Practice Schools** based on both qualitative data (gathered from school visits) and quantitative data (Stanford 9 and MCAS results, especially progress in closing the achievement gap).

The district and the Boston Plan for Excellence will work together to:

- Describe the effective practices that improve mathematics and literacy instruction;
- Recognize and celebrate schools where staff are engaged in collaborative learning for improved practice in classrooms;
- Provide incentives and increased autonomy to schools implementing effective practices schoolwide;
- Provide targeted support to schools to ensure they have the capacity to share effective practices;
- Create networks for school leaders (teachers, principals, headmasters) to work together and improve practice;
- Use videotape and other technology to document and share best practices across the district.

The district also will make better use of **pilot schools** and **Horace Mann Charter Schools** as centers of innovation. Created in the 1994 Boston Teachers Union contract, pilot schools were designed to explore innovative educational strategies which could be replicated throughout the district. (Two pilot schools were converted to Horace Mann Charter Schools, which are approved by the State but remain within the local school district.) In the next three years, Boston will expand from 11 of these schools to 14, two of which will be in new schools approved for construction. The district also will strengthen these schools' role as educational laboratories by requiring them to document instructional, assessment and management practices which improve teaching and learning and routinely disseminate them districtwide.

What every school will achieve:

- ✓ The principal and staff will visit classrooms regularly as part of the school's ongoing professional development plan.

- ✓ Instructional staff will visit other schools and welcome colleagues into their classrooms.
- ✓ Peer coaching and counseling will be institutionalized.
- ✓ Common planning time will be used efficiently and cooperatively to look at student work and share best practices.
- ✓ Traditional approaches proven ineffective in reaching students will be replaced by innovative strategies with proven results.
- ✓ Every middle and high school will adopt two or three agreed-upon best practices to be implemented consistently across disciplines and classrooms.

Essential Five: Align all resources with the instructional focus.

Boston schools are faced with the tremendous challenge of bringing about dramatic improvement within the reality of limited resources. To create an environment that is best suited to support Whole School Improvement, schools must direct all available resources to the achievement of their goals. Three of the most critical levers for school change are the effective use of **staff, schedule and budget**. Schools will be required to examine each of these areas closely and align them to focus on instruction and professional development.

As part of the school-based management approach, many of a school's important decisions about personnel, scheduling and the use of discretionary funds are made by the **School Site Council**. The members of these governing bodies will be trained and will work closely with the district's Budget Office to understand how resources are allocated and the role of schools in the process.

Boston is one of the few urban districts in the nation that has created an internal/external group to review, analyze and adjust its practice as a routine part of its operation. The **Resource Action Team (REACT)** will continue and expand its work to rethink the connections between central administration departments and schools. Using principals and headmasters as its "clients," REACT will make specific recommendations to the Superintendent on improving the delivery of a variety of services, including facilities management, operations, contracts, collective bargaining, school and central staffing, budget and student assignment.

The district also will continue to work with schools to ensure that existing resources are protected and maintained for long-term use. In particular, a new **textbook inventory control** plan will help ensure that instructional materials remain in circulation from one school year to the next.

What every school will achieve:

- ✓ The school will creatively use all funds -- regardless of the source -- to advance student performance goals.

- ✓ The school's structure and schedule will be continually refined to support the learning goals.
- ✓ All specialized staff will function in support of the school as a whole.
- ✓ The school will develop a strategy to pursue additional external funding.

Essential Six: Engage families, community and partners to support Whole School Improvement.

Families and community partners have a vital role to play in supporting the growth and education of students in and out of the classroom. The Whole School Improvement process can succeed only when teachers and principals work closely with families and community providers to keep the needs of children – academic and non-academic – first and foremost.

Schools must be particularly creative and proactive in reaching out to **parents** and other caretakers to engage them in their students' education. With a citywide emphasis on high standards for all, family involvement cannot be measured simply by attendance at open houses or School Site Council meetings. Rather, schools will provide opportunities for families to understand, support and contribute to their child's academic progress, especially during the hours and days when students are not in school.

Boston schools also have an extensive set of **community partnerships** with businesses, colleges and universities, arts and cultural institutions, parent organizations and human services agencies. These partners must be viewed as members of the extended school community whose participation in Whole School Improvement is essential if students are to learn at high levels.

The fourth **Boston Compact** was signed in April 2000 by Mayor Menino, Superintendent Payzant, the Boston School Committee, the Boston Teachers Union and representatives of the business, human services, higher education and cultural sectors. The district will work closely with signatories of Compact to further the three central goals outlined in the pact: meeting the high standards challenge, increasing students' opportunities for college and career success, and preparing the next generation of teachers and principals.

Effective communication with families and community partners must be defined not only by sharing information but also by creating opportunities for widespread **discussion and participation** in the life of each school. Principals and headmasters will ensure that their school climate is welcoming to families and partners. To that end, staff must be properly trained in **customer service** so that all members of the school community are treated with respect and are fully engaged in the life of the school. **School/Family Compacts** signed

by the parents and staff who serve on School Site Councils will articulate how families and schools can support one another to improve student achievement.

What every school will achieve:

- ✓ School Site Councils will compose and sign a School-Family Compact.
- ✓ A family liaison – based on models developed through the Boston Annenberg Challenge and others – will help strengthen ties among schools, families, community organizations and central offices.
- ✓ The Instructional Leadership Team and School Site Council will include a diverse group of parents and community members reflective of the student population.
- ✓ Schools will use a variety of strategies to help families and partners feel welcome, invited, appreciated and engaged in the education of children.
- ✓ Principals and teachers will be trained in communicating effectively with families, including sensitivity to cultural and language differences.
- ✓ Principals and headmasters will be held accountable for setting goals and developing strategies to engage families and partners in the schools.
- ✓ Strong partnerships between schools and a variety of businesses, universities, human service providers and cultural institutions will support the schools' performance goals.
- ✓ Schools will work closely with the Mayor's 2:00-to-6:00 After-School Initiative, the City's Office of Community Partnerships and other resources to engage students in educational and social activities beyond the school day.

District-wide support for continuous improvement

The essential work of improving teaching and learning for all students must occur day by day in every classroom in every Boston school. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the Boston Public Schools is also a school district which is greater than the sum of its 130 individual schools. As such, the district has a responsibility to set district-wide goals and standards, establish benchmarks, provide support for continuous improvement and ensure that effective management and accountability systems are in place.

While the primary focus will remain on teaching and learning, the district must also address a variety of issues which help set the stage and support improved academic performance. These include:

- creating safe, caring, and state-of-the-art environments for learning,
- strengthening operations and business support systems,
- communicating effectively and respectfully with stakeholders.

Creating Safe, Caring, State-of-the-Art Environments for Learning

In order to implement the Six Essentials for Whole School Improvement effectively, schools and the district will accelerate efforts to enrich the **school environment** – creating state-of-the-art facilities and a climate of safety, civility, support, respect and collaboration in every school building.

EDUCATION FOR A DIVERSE CITY

Accelerated student achievement and support can occur only in schools that are committed to developing the **whole child**. Under the leadership of the **Unified Student Services Team**, schools will take a more active role in recognizing and addressing the broad range of students' academic, social, recreational, physical, mental and emotional needs and in fostering effective partnerships with community-based organizations.

Similarly, instructional strategies must reflect that in addition to general education programs, many of Boston's 63,000 students are enrolled in **special, bilingual and alternative education** programs.

Nearly one in five Boston children receives **special education** services. The Unified Student Services Team will work closely with schools to ensure that services for all students – with and without disabilities – are viewed not as separate domains but as part of a continuum. Boston schools need to strengthen connections with community organizations and other partners to ensure that their work is more closely aligned with the instructional priorities of the schools.

The 2000 Census confirmed that Boston is becoming an increasingly diverse city, particularly with a growing population of students from **non-English language** backgrounds. Whole School Improvement Plans will include specific strategies for helping English language learners achieve literacy and other academic standards that are essential for success. Schools and district offices will develop strategies to communicate effectively with all students and families in language that is understandable, culturally appropriate, and free of educational jargon.

Boston will expand efforts to ensure that every adult and student in the school community understands and demonstrates appropriate **behavior**, based on the findings and recommendations of the School Climate and Behavior Workgroup. The district will review and update the *Code of Discipline* and fully implement the 12-Point Safety Plan developed with the Mayor's Office, the Boston Police Department and community partners.

Boston also will increase its investment in **alternative education** programs, including expansion of the successful program for overage students. The district also will increase the number of seats for disruptive middle and high school students with the opening of a new alternative pilot school.

STATE-OF-THE-ART FACILITIES

By 2003, the City's seven-year **capital investment** in school buildings will be nearly \$370 million. In the years ahead, Boston will renovate and maintain existing facilities to be state-of-the-art centers of learning and will build new schools with an emphasis on academic excellence and the flexible configuration of space in anticipation of changing needs over time and community use.

Facilities improvements will be carried out in five categories:

- ? **Accreditation:** The school district will be pro-active in maintenance and renovations to schools in keeping with new guidelines and expectations for accreditation of schools.
- ? **Custodial operations:** Buildings will be clean, bright and attractive environments that meet a high standard of custodial care.
- ? **Maintenance:** Routine upkeep on all schools will be timely and thorough to help protect the investment in school facilities.
- ? **Major renovations:** Renovations, remodeling and expansions where needed will be timely and of a high quality – for example, the extensive renovation and expansion of the Jeremiah E. Burke High School.
- ? **New Schools:** New schools will be constructed that will serve as state-of-the-art learning centers. Groundbreaking will commence during the 2001-2002 school year on the new middle school at Brunswick Gardens and a K-8 school at Orchard Gardens. Construction of a new middle school on Mildred Avenue will begin in the

following year. Siting of a new high school and the Quincy Upper School also will be priorities.

- ? **Schoolyards:** The Boston Schoolyards Initiative, which creates new schoolyards for schools and communities, will expand.

NEW TECHNOLOGY

Virtually every aspect of Boston's education reform efforts in and out of the classroom over the next five years will be enhanced through **technology**. In doing so, the district will remain sensitive to and strive to close the gap between those families who have immediate access to technology and those who do not – a gap often referred to as the "digital divide."

Within the next five years, Boston's use of technology will be improved to:

- ? make technology available to all students by reducing the computer-to-student ratio to one computer for every four students;
- ? support students' learning and prepare them for careers in technology, particularly through expansion of the TechBoston program;
- ? provide training for every school to use technology as an instructional tool;
- ? provide technical upgrades to support effective use of up-to-date management and teaching and learning systems;
- ? collect and utilize data for effective management and decision-making on facilities, human resources, finance, students and curricula.

Strengthening Operations and Business Support Systems

HUMAN RESOURCES

Key to the success of these efforts is the continued investment in a revamped **Human Resources** function in order to recruit and retain a **highly qualified, consumer-responsive staff**. The district will work with external partners to create an infrastructure which supports employees in the effective delivery of services using state-of-the-art technology and training in customer service.

In the years ahead, Boston will need to expand its efforts **to recruit, hire, train and retain** a diverse pool of top-notch teachers. Recruiters will focus their local and national search on areas of critical need – particularly mathematics, science, special and bilingual education.

The district will work in partnership with the Boston Teachers Union to implement significant reforms in the hiring, assignment, and evaluation process, which will enable schools to assemble a highly qualified staff much earlier in the spring.

Boston is working with the Higher Education Partnership to **create new professional development schools**. Three colleges/universities are partnered with three Boston schools to create for the education profession what teaching hospitals provide to the health professions through research and training. Boston will double the number of these partnerships, pairing three additional schools with area colleges.

New and veteran teachers alike will have opportunities **for mentorship and training** to help advance their professional goals and retain them in Boston schools. **Professional development for principals and headmasters** will also be a major priority, with emphasis on helping school administrators to be highly qualified as instructional leaders in their schools.

In order for students to meet higher performance standards, it is necessary that all staff be trained and held responsible for **higher standards of performance** as well. Boston will improve training opportunities and the performance evaluation process for all staff throughout the district to ensure that all adults are making a valuable contribution to the schools' improvement goals and providing high quality customer service. An important aspect of every professional job description and evaluation will be effective and respectful customer service in all connections among staff, students, parents and the community.

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

To meet the ambitious goals of the Boston Public Schools, new resources will need to be generated and improved uses for existing revenue streams will be necessary over the next five years to meet this challenge. Boston will create a comprehensive resource development strategy that is prepared to take full advantage of all possible resources available to schools and school children through public and private funding sources to support Boston's instructional goal. The district will make the case that Boston's diverse urban student population deserves additional resources which are necessary to accelerate its achievement and meet high standards. The six-hour school day is not enough. After school, Saturdays and summer programs are essential.

The development strategy will also create a coherent approach for corporate and philanthropic funding sources. While Boston has enjoyed great success in recent years in corporate and foundation grant development, there is still a need for sharper and more focused use of resources to support the classroom and meet the expectations of whole school improvement.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION

An important aspect of a focused plan for improving teaching and learning is the need to more tightly align all available resources to district priorities. It is essential that all budget allocation decisions, in every school and in every administrative department throughout the

school district, be clearly and specifically supportive of the instructional mission of the schools and based on continuing evaluation of effectiveness.

Boston also needs to improve its business support systems for an all funds approach to budgeting. While a great deal of work has been done to make budget planning simpler and more timely for schools, the district needs to push further to develop state-of-the-art budget and financial systems which provide access to data for planning, decision-making, management and accountability. Not only financial data but information on student results and professional performance will be made more available and in more readily useful forms for staff in schools and throughout the district.

Communicating Effectively and Respectfully with Stakeholders

A large urban school district presents numerous challenges and opportunities for **communication** among all stakeholders. In recent years, city leaders, school staff and partner organizations have helped promote civic involvement in school improvement, particularly by encouraging opportunities for families and the community to visit classrooms and see adults and students engaged in teaching and learning. Boston will continue to expand strategies to strengthen the lines of communication and collaboration between schools and the community at large.

The district will expand strategies to inform constituents about education reform efforts and create new opportunities for public participation. To this end, the School Committee and Superintendent will devise and implement the second phase of a systemwide **communications plan**, including a full audit of existing practices and resources. This plan will include:

- ? **School level communication:** To support effective engagement of families in the education of their children, principals and headmasters will be required to set and implement annual objectives for family and community engagement.
- ? **Communication with Partners:** Boston will be clear about its expectations for partners and seek their agreement at the outset on how outcomes will be assessed.
- ? **Audit of all methods and materials of communication:** Uniformity, clarity and straightforward language without jargon will characterize communications to the district and with the community as a whole. Boston will review all present communications vehicles, and will train and support staff to be more timely, responsive and accessible in all regular communications.

Conclusion

During the last five years, Boston has generated many successful changes in practice and produced significant improvements in student results in classrooms across the city.

- *Focus On Children* has helped put all of the key pieces in place to make meaningful education reform a reality.
- The city's leadership – the Mayor, School Committee and Superintendent – are united in pursuit of ambitious goals.
- Teachers throughout the district understand and are committed to improving instructional practice as the key to student achievement.
- The community at large is strongly engaged in the schools – with many new and longstanding partnerships supporting the teaching and learning agenda.
- Families believe that every student is capable of achieving high standards and are working closely with schools to support their children's education.

This citywide investment in the Boston Public Schools has begun to replace decades of skepticism and decline with optimism and improvement. The challenge for the next five years is to build on this foundation and accelerate reform efforts across the board. While there is noticeable acceleration in key grades, improvement at all levels must be swifter and more dramatic to meet the high-stakes challenge of the MCAS test.

To do so, the district will use high standards to drive instruction and professional development, draw on the resources and expertise of families and the community, and utilize student performance data to help teachers and administrators identify what is working and where changes need to be made.

Achieving high standards is no longer a mystery. It is an attainable goal for every student, in every classroom, in every school. To succeed, everyone involved in these vital reform efforts must remain clear about the objectives and seek new ways to contribute consistently and effectively on behalf of Boston's future.

Thomas M. Menino
Mayor of Boston

Boston School Committee

Elizabeth Reilinger, Ph.D., Chair • Alfreda Harris, Vice-Chair
Angel Amy-Moreno, Ph.D. • Robert P. Gittens • Susan Naimark
Marchelle Raynor • William Spring

Thomas W. Payzant
Superintendent



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



NOTICE

REPRODUCTION BASIS



This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket) form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.



This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").